

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

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CHAPTER XXII.

A BITTER east wind, which was taking sufficiently depressing effect upon all London, was dealing with peculiar grimness with Redburn Street, Camden Town. The neat little houses in that dreary grey dryness looked sordidly wretched; there was something deserted and hopeless about them. No one was to be seen, except that at a first-floor window about half-way down a woman's figure was standing, and as Dennis Falconer turned into the street his footsteps rang with heavy distinctness on the glaring pavement. He strode slowly and steadily along, and his solitary figure, as it stood out with that peculiar sharpness of outline which is a characteristic production of east wind, harmonised absolutely with the sombreness of the background. His face was full of sombre purpose, grave and stern.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday—two days after Julian's return home. On the morning of the preceding day Julian and his mother had had a second interview, which had ended in his giving a sullen and reluctant assent to her demands; and in the evening Dennis Falconer had received from Mrs. Romaine a brief, almost peremptory note, begging him to come to her. He had gone to Queen Anne Street accordingly, severely unsympathetic, but also severely reliable, early on Wednesday morning.

He had found Mrs. Romaine in a feverish agony of agitation beyond even

the power of her will to conceal or wholly to control. Her voice, painfully thin and sharp; her gestures restless, nervous, irritable; her utterance hard and rapid; had all testified to a strained, tense excitement before which all her artificiality was utterly submerged, and in which Falconer himself was obviously regarded by her solely as the one instrument at hand to her necessity. Her whole soul seemed to be set upon the immediate termination of "the affair," as she called it. It affected her evidently in only one way, she looked at it from only one point of view: as something to be finished up, put away, buried out of sight. It was the thought of delay in doing this, only, that appeared to torture her; of the affair itself with all its terrible significance, its inevitable consequences, she had, as far as Falconer could divine, no adequate conception. The girl must be bought off; must be sent away; must be sent right out of the country in case—and here came the one agonised sense of a possible consequence which Falconer could detect—in case Julian should marry her after all!

It was evidently the haunting terror of such a contingency which had driven her to send for Falconer. It was obvious, though she seemed to be striving hard to conceal it even from herself, that she could not trust her son; that she could find no rest in the promise she had wrung from him. What she had to say to Falconer was, in effect, that some one else must see the girl; the arrangement to be surely effected must be brought about by a third person who would set about the business promptly and act decidedly. It was this service which she wanted of Falconer, and Falconer, after a moment's grave self-communing, agreed to render it. He

was as far removed from sympathy with her in this her hard, agonised reality as he had been from the artificial woman of the previous months, or from the real woman of eighteen years before. He considered her point of view in the present instance absolutely revolting in her. But no man could question the practical sense of what she said, or the advisability of the course she proposed, and his conception of his obligations as her sole male relative and trustee was too intimately intertwined with his sense of duty and self-respect to allow him to entertain, even for a moment, the possibility of refusing to act for her. He had stood by her side, impelled by that sense of duty, gravely reliable, and unsympathetic, eighteen years before. The irony of fate decreed that it was for him, and for him only, to act for her now. To him it was simply the stern dictate of moral necessity to be obeyed as such. Accordingly he had received her instructions, offering now and again a grim, practical suggestion, with a stern air of business-like reserve; had undertaken—being at the bottom of her opinion as to the desirability of instant measures—to see “the girl” that same afternoon; and he was walking down Redburn Street now in the pitiless east wind to carry that undertaking into effect.

He reached the house, knocked, and asked briefly for Mrs. Roden. The landlady, whose sentiments towards her lodgers had developed rapidly in consequence of the enquiries which Falconer had felt it his duty to make, received his words with a sniff expressive of contempt; and then informed him, with a stare of insolent curiosity, that “she” was “hupstairs,” and led the way thither; evidently urged to that act of civility solely by a hope of finding out something. She was a coarse, vulgar-looking woman, with small red eyes, which glittered expectantly as she flung the door open and announced, in a loud and denunciatory voice, “‘Ere’s a gentleman!”

But if she had hoped for startling revelations she was disappointed. Dennis Falconer advanced into the room with stern composure; the figure in the window turned quickly but quietly to meet him; and Mrs. Jackson was obliged to shut the door upon the two.

Clemence was looking very pale. The vague shadow which had fallen upon her as she journeyed up to London two days before had deepened into a wistful, questioning sadness. She had not seen

Julian since she parted from him at Victoria Station. On the previous day she had received a note from him which told her that “work” kept him from her for that day, but that he would come as soon as he was able. There was nothing to distress or alarm her in the fact itself; more than once before a similar disappointment had come to her, and even though the second day brought her no letter, the blank merely meant, as she assured herself hour by hour, that she would see him before the day was done. But strive against it as she might, and did, she had spent the past twenty-four hours weighed down by a sense of trouble utterly undefined; utterly, as it seemed to her, without reason. She had borne her burden with mute patience, reproaching herself as for ingratitude and an inordinate desire for active happiness, and struggling bravely to conquer it; but neither arguing about it nor denying it as a less simple and straightforward nature would have done. And now the appearance of Falconer seemed suddenly to focus and define her vague distress. The sudden conviction that Julian was ill, and that this gentleman had come from him to tell her so, held her still and silent in a pang of cruel realisation and anticipation.

The light, as she moved, had fallen full upon her face, and as he saw it a certain shock passed through Dennis Falconer. He had seen her figure, and even her face in the distance more than once, but he had never before seen it with any distinctness, and for the first instant the simplicity and purity of its beauty, with the expression deepened by the strange shadow through which the past two days had led her, clashed almost painfully with that idea of “the girl” which had grown, during his conversation with Mrs. Romayns, into a kind of fact for him. The next moment, however, he had reconciled appearances and realities, as he conceived them, with the grim reflection that there is no vice so vicious as that which wears an innocent face; and in doing so had quenched what might have been perception beneath a weight of narrow truism.

No greeting of any kind passed between them. All Clemence’s faculties were absorbed in her dread. Falconer was busied with that process of reconciliation. The strange little silence was broken eventually by Falconer, and he spoke with the unbending sternness and distance which that process and its conclusion had naturally accentuated.

"I am here as the representative of Julian Roden's nearest relative and guardian," he said. It had been arranged between himself and Mrs. Romaine, on the suggestion of the latter, that "the girl," if she did not already know it, should be kept in ignorance of Julian's real name.

The statement was slightly over-coloured, since Julian was of age, and his mother was no longer his guardian in any legal sense; but to stern moralists of Falconer's type, to whom the pretty little falsenesses of life are wholly to be condemned, a slight misstatement in such a case is frequently permissible. The brief, uncompromising words had seemed to him to set the key of the interview beyond mistake. He was consequently slightly taken aback by their effect.

Every trace of colour died out of Clemence's face, and two great dilated eyes gazed at him for an instant in dumb agony before she whispered:

"He's not—dead?"

Falconer made a slight, almost contemptuous, negative gesture. He had no intention of being imposed upon by theatrical arts, and as Clemence, her self-control shattered by the sudden relief, turned instinctively away, and pressed her face down on the arm with which she had caught at the curtain for support, he went on with immovable sternness:

"My business has to do with his life, not his death. The main point is very simple, and I will put it to you at once. Absolute ruin lies before him. Is he or is he not to embrace it?"

He saw her start, and she lifted her face quickly, and turned it to him all quivering and unstrung from her recent suffering, and quite white.

"He is in trouble!" she cried, low and breathlessly. "Oh, what is it? What has happened?"

Dennis Falconer's patience was approaching its limits, and he spoke curtly and conclusively.

"I think we may dispense with this kind of thing," he said. "It can serve no purpose, as everything is known. I come now from his mother with full power to act for her—"

He was interrupted. A burning colour, the colour of such paralyzing surprise as can take in hardly the bare statement, much less the consequent developments and inferences, had rushed suddenly over Clemence's face, dyeing her very throat.

"His mother!" she exclaimed. "His mother!" Her tone dropped as she repeated the words into a strange, uncertain murmur, in which incredulity, acceptance—as a kind of experiment—and something that was almost fear, were inextricably blended.

The fear alone caught Falconer's ear. His lips were parted to resume his speech with grim decisiveness in the conviction that she understood at last that nothing was to be gained by trifling with him, when she said, as though he had had nothing to do with her previous words:

"Go on, please."

He looked at her again, and was struck by a new look in her face, as he had been struck by a new tone in her voice. She was evidently going to drop all theatricalities, he told himself.

"Perhaps you were not aware that he is, practically, under the control of his mother," he said. "That is to say, he is dependent on her for every penny he spends. It is quite out of the question that he should make money at the bar—by his own profession, that is to say—for two or three years at least. Consequently the cutting off of the allowance made him by Mrs.—Roden will mean for him absolute penury."

She was staring at him; staring at him out of two wide, intense brown eyes; with such a helpless bewilderment in her face that she seemed to be quite dazed. She put her hand to her head as he paused with a feeble, uncertain gesture; but she did not speak, and Falconer went on severely:

"I conclude that he has not represented these facts to you as they stand. They are facts, nevertheless. You will, therefore, understand that, his allowance withdrawn, he will be entirely without the means of supporting you. You may possibly consider that some shifty means might be found which, by putting him in possession of small sums of money, would enable him for a time to defy his mother. Let me point out to you something of what such a course would involve. Julian Roden is a young man with a good position in society—I mean he is accustomed to be made much of by men and women who are his equals; he has chances and opportunities of which he intends, no doubt, to avail himself. All this, in taking such a step, he would throw away for ever. Social intercourse, future career, would go with his income at

his mother's word. Now, I will ask you only how long you could hope to depend on him in such circumstances; how long it would be before his only feeling for the woman whom he had allowed to drag him down and to destroy all his hopes in life would degenerate into sheer repugnance; and for how long he would care to keep her?"

He paused, and after a moment's dead silence Clemence spoke in a weak, eager, almost desperate voice:

"There must be some mistake! It—it can't be—the same!"

The words seemed to Falconer a mere miserable subterfuge, and he answered very sternly:

"There is not the faintest possibility of mistake. Julian Roden has owned the whole affair to his mother, who taxed him with it on her discovery——"

"Oh, wait a minute! Wait a minute!"

There was a ring of such intolerable pain, such shame and anguish, in the voice, that Falconer's attention, heavy and prejudiced as it was, was arrested by it. Dimly and uncertainly, and for the first time, the girl before him appeared to him not simply as a representative of a degraded sisterhood, but as a woman. He looked at her for a moment, as she stood with her face buried in her hands, quivering from head to foot, with a severe kind of pity.

"I will tell you, as briefly as may be, what I am charged to say," he said gravely, but not ungently. "Mrs.—— Roden is determined to break off her son's disgraceful connection with you at the cost of any suffering to herself or to him. She is willing to believe that her son is to be considered in some sort as the more guilty party of the two in having acted as the tempter, and she has no wish to deal otherwise than generously by you. But there are conditions."

He paused again. Over the slender, bowed woman's figure before him there had gradually crept, as he spoke, a stillness like the stillness of death; and now, as he waited for her to speak, Clemence slowly lifted her head and looked at him; looked at him with dull, sunken eyes, which seemed the only living points in a face out of which all life and expression seemed to have been crushed by a rigid, haggard mask.

"Conditions?" she repeated.

Her voice was hollow, and had a mono-

tonous, far-away sound, and the word seemed to have no meaning for her.

A sense of vague discomfort took possession of Dennis Falconer. A dim sense that he was not being met as he had expected—as he had a right to expect—disturbed and annoyed him. He had no idea that what he was chiefly discomposed by was a hazy consciousness that a touch of unconscionable respect for the woman who, as he believed, was utterly unworthy of respect, was mingling with his already sufficiently unorthodox sense of pity; but he entrenched himself in a triple armour of stiffness.

"The conditions are these," he said. "You will give your written word, as under penalties for having obtained money by false pretences, to leave England on a given date and by a given route, and not to return to England within the next ten years. Mrs.——Roden in return will pay you the sum of five hundred pounds. If you refuse these terms, and Roden submits to his mother, you will simply be the poorer by five hundred pounds. If you induce him to defy his mother, the consequences I have already described to you will inevitably ensue."

He waited for her answer, steadily fortifying himself against being surprised at anything she might say; but no answer came. That strange stricken face was still turned full towards him, but he had an uneasy sense that he was not seen by the great, dull, dark eyes. He felt, too, that as she stood there with her hands tightly clasped together, she was not thinking even remotely of the choice he had set before her, though he knew somehow that she had heard his words and understood them. It was with an instinctive desire to rouse her, to bring back some expression to her face, that he said, with an awkward gentleness which was quite involuntary:

"There is no need for you to decide hastily. You understand the alternative thoroughly, no doubt. I will leave you my address, and you can write me your answer."

He felt in his pocket for his card-case, and the movement seemed to rouse her. She stopped him with a slight motion of her hand.

"There's no need," she said. As though the act of speaking had brought her back from somewhere far away, and as though the claims of the moment were gradually becoming present to her, she paused as though to gather force, and to close upon

herself a certain strangely fine reserve, which seemed at once to hedge her about and hold her aloof from the man to whom she spoke; and then she spoke, very quietly. "I don't want any money. If it is better that he should be free of me, he shall be free. That's all."

"You are making a mistake!" returned Falconer quickly. There was something about the dignity of her manner which made him feel curiously impotent and small, as though in the presence of an unknown power greater than himself, and the sense increased the touch of irritation he had already experienced. His tone was no longer coldly stern; it was insistent and annoyed. "You should consider your future. If you accept Mrs. Roden's offer and leave England with a small capital you will have a chance of beginning life again. The step you have lately taken may be your first step on the downward path—I conclude that it is. You should reflect how difficult it is to pause there. With a little money you may establish yourself in a respectable business, and in the course of time you may even redeem your unfortunate past."

Not a muscle of the still, pale face moved. It seemed to have grown strangely older and stronger in the course of the short interview, and it listened to him with an air of courteous patience which seemed to set an impassable distance between them. The perfect steadiness of her voice as she replied was the steadiness not of composure but of reserve.

"It is quite impossible!" she said.

"Then I am sorry to have to say that I consider you both foolish and ungrateful!" said Falconer with increasing severity. "You put it entirely out of our power to do anything for you. Am I to understand that you refuse to leave England?"

"I don't know. I must think!" Still the same distant, unmoved patience.

"You will do well to think," was Falconer's reply, "and to put away from you in doing so a false pride, which is entirely misplaced. I will give you twenty-four hours for consideration, and to-morrow afternoon I will call and see you again." On second thoughts it had occurred to Falconer that it would be a false step to give her his name and address. "I shall hope to find that you have come to a sensible decision."

He paused a moment, and she made a slight gesture of acquiescence, rather as though his words were indifferent to her

than in any token of assent to what he said. He added a stiff, formal "Good afternoon!" and as her lips moved mechanically as if to frame the words in answer, he turned and left the room.

As though his presence and his words had been so mere a drop in the deep waters of suffering which held her that his withdrawal affected her not at all, Clemence stood for the moment just as he left her, hardly conscious, as it seemed, that he was gone. Then, as though the sense that she was alone had come to her gradually, she dropped feebly into a chair, and let her face fall heavily forward upon the table.

MASHONALAND.

AFRICA has always been the dark continent—the continent of mysterious speculation and romance from the earliest historic times. As far back as Herodotus we have a distinct account of the exploration of its coasts by order of Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt, who about one thousand years before the Christian Era, despatched some vessels under the conduct of the Phoenicians, which sailed round Africa by way of the Red Sea and the east coast, and came home the third year through the Straits of Gibraltar. They seem to have landed once—where is not stated—and planted corn, and when it ripened, proceeded on their journey.

Herodotus also tells us of an embassy sent by Cambyses, King of Persia, to the King of Ethiopia, but how far this expedition penetrated into the interior is a matter of uncertainty. The embassy was not a success, and the presents sent by Cambyses, among which was a golden necklace, excited the disdain of the Ethiopian monarch, who conducted the envoys to the public prison, where all that were confined were secured by chains of gold.

From the time of Herodotus to the fall of the Roman Empire, mysterious stories seem to have reached the ears of civilisation: stories of the pigmies and the Mountains of the Moon, stories of women warriors, of white inhabitants, and other wonders more or less untrustworthy. But for a period of nearly a thousand years after the decline of the Roman Empire, not only was the interior of Africa once more shrouded in darkness, but the very coast-line itself at the close of the fourteenth century was only known to European

civilisation as far as the Strait of Babel-mandeb on the east, and Cape Nun on the western side.

The Portuguese claim to be the first navigators who put a girdle round Africa, and so far as European nations are concerned, this claim is undoubtedly well-founded. Gillianez, starting from Cape Bajador, opposite the Canaries, doubled the Cape of Good Hope in 1434, and sailing up the east coast reached Cape Guardafui, at the entrance of the Red Sea. Far from being the pioneers, however, the Portuguese in this voyage merely traversed the route already covered in an opposite direction by the Phenicians two thousand five hundred years previously, and instead of being the first explorers of the coast, they were soon to learn that an earlier civilisation had been not only on the east and west coasts of the continent, but had penetrated far into the interior.

The prime motive of the Portuguese in undertaking these voyages was not, as some have supposed, to survey the coast of Africa, or in the hope of obtaining wealth from its shores. As was the case with Columbus, their chief ambition was to reach India, then considered to be the chief repository of the mineral and other treasures of the world. This may be seen by the conduct of Vasco da Gama, in his memorable expedition of 1497, when, after following the coast as far north as Melinde, he steered straight for India under the guidance of local pilots. But commercial activity was not lacking when the Portuguese first made their appearance in these waters. Arab traders from Mecca and other Red Sea ports, as well as Hindoos from India, were engaged in trade. It was due to this fact, and to the similarity in name of the principal port and outlet for the gold trade of the interior, that led the Portuguese to believe that in Sofala they had discovered the Ophir of the ancients.

Sofala, still so called, was the seaport and capital of an immense kingdom which extended from the River Limpopo northwards far beyond the Zambesi, and was captured by the Portuguese in 1505. They erected a fort which they called Fort Ophir, and the ruins of it still remain.

The whole of this territory seems to have belonged at this time to a powerful prince called Monomotapa, or Juiteva, for he was known by both titles; the first being probably a general one, meaning "Lord of the Mines," from the Bantu words "Bena"

and "Mona," answering to our chief, lord or master, and "Motapa," mine, from the root "tapa," to excavate. The two Portuguese historians, to whom we are chiefly indebted for accounts of these regions and their inhabitants, are De Barros, who was born in 1496 and died in 1570, and Father Ivano dos Santos, who appears to have been one of the missionaries of the order of St. Dominic, who embarked at Lisbon in April, 1506, and arrived at Mozambique on the thirteenth of August following. The accounts of these worthies must not be taken too literally, as, like their contemporaries who recounted the deeds of Cortes and his band among the Aztecs, they were more inclined to panegyric than historic accuracy. At the same time, whatever is interesting in their accounts had best be described in their own words. De Barros, in his "Asia," First Decade, Book x., chapter i., writes as follows:

"All the land which we include in the Kingdom of Sofala is a great region, ruled by a pagan prince named Benomotapa; it is enclosed like an island by two arms of a river, which issues from the most considerable lake in all Africa, which was much sought after by the ancients as being the hidden source of the famous Nile, whence also issues our Zaire—Congo—which flows by the kingdom of Congo. This prince, whom we call Benomotapa, or Monomotapa, is, as with us, an emperor, for this is the meaning of his name amongst them, and his state does not consist of much pomp or show about his person, for the greatest ornament which he has in his house are some cotton stuffs which are made with great labour in the country, each of which may be as large as one of our sumptuous robes, and worth from twenty to fifty cruzados. For insignia of his royal state he has a very small hoe with ivory head, which he always wears in his girdle in sign of peace, and another emblem is one or two assegais to denote justice and defence of his people. Under his lordship are some great princes, some of whom, bordering upon distant kings, at times revolt against him, and on this account he usually retains by him the heirs of such chiefs. There are no horses amongst them, so that Benomotapa makes war on foot with weapons such as bows and arrows, throwing darts, daggers, iron battle-axes, which are very sharp, and next his person he keeps over two hundred dogs, for they say that these are very faithful, both in the hunt and war." Dos Santos gives a some-

what different and fuller account of Monomotapa and his surroundings. It is, perhaps, more trustworthy, as he certainly lived at Sofala for some time, and probably accompanied Baretto in his military expeditions to the interior. He always, however, calls the Emperor by his title of Juiteva, and in this connection states that "it is common to the sovereign lord of the country bordering on the River Sofala, which, at his accession to that dignity, he assumes to the exclusion of the titles he might before have been known by; this dignity, in the esteem of the people, placing him on the level of the Deity."

The description of the Court and other ceremonials is too long for insertion here, so we will confine ourselves to one or two extracts recounting Baretto's expedition, the main object of which was to obtain possession of the gold and silver mines of the interior. "Don Sebastian was scarcely seated on the throne of Portugal before he resolved on sending an expedition to Sofala, entrusting the command to Francis Baretto, who, penetrating into the kingdom of Macoronga and Manica, discovered mines of gold in these countries, of which, by his prudence and valour, he made himself master. In the prosecution of his designs it was necessary that he should pass through the territory of the Juiteva, who, objecting to the measure, prepared to resist. The resolution of the Portuguese enabled them, however, to open a passage for themselves through the files of the enemy. Baretto continued to follow up his conquests by land and sea. Juiteva at last fled from his capital, Zemboe, carrying the inhabitants to a neighbouring forest rather than risk the defence of the city. It was given up to pillage and fire, and the march was continued towards the kingdom of Manica, which was reached in a few days." Anxious as the Portuguese were to obtain a firm footing in the country, their methods of proceeding rendered their efforts abortive. Baretto, as well as their other leaders, was more of the military commander than the explorer, and the expeditions were of a purely military character when not undertaken for the purposes of plunder. Even their missionary efforts were carried on by force of arms. A Jesuit mission was despatched for the purpose of enlightening the subjects of Monomotapa, who were described as being "as black of soul as of body." These missionaries were directed "to subdue the aboriginal populations by their teachings

as the military subdued them by the sword."

Such methods could only result in disaster, and all that survives of the missionary efforts are a few songs repeated as potent spells by the Zambezi boatmen, in which may be recognised faint traces of the worship introduced by the Dominican and Jesuit fathers.

Faint as are the traces of Portuguese occupation of the immense tract of fertile and wealthy country now known as Mashona and Matabele lands, there was then in existence, a still older civilisation, of which Monomotapa and his people were certainly not the descendants, and which was possibly as far advanced beyond the Portuguese civilisation of that day as the rude culture of Monomotapa and his subjects, with their "souls as black as their bodies," was inferior to it. Of this civilisation there are still existing evidences, gigantic and conclusive.

This, at any rate, seems to have been the view taken by the Arab traders, to whom the Portuguese were indebted for a description of the ruins of Zimbabwe, as related by De Barros in his history. As the earliest account of these marvellous relics it is too important to be omitted: "There are other mines in a district called Torva. This land is near the other which we said consisted of extensive plains, and these mines are the oldest that are known in that region. They are all in a plain, in the middle of which stands a square fortress all of dressed stones within and without, well wrought, and of marvellous size, without any mortar showing the joinings, the walls of which are twenty-five hands thick, but the height is not so great as compared to the thickness. And above the gateway of that edifice is an inscription, which some learned Moorish traders, who were there, could not read nor say what writing it was. And grouped, as it were, round this structure are others on some heights, like it in the stonework and without mortar, in which is a tower twelve braças—seventy-two feet—high.

"When or by whom these edifices were built, the people of the country, being unlettered, have no memory, only they say they are the work of the devil, because, compared to their own power and skill, they do not think men could have made them; and some Moors who had seen them, when shown the work of our fortress of Sofala, the workmanship of the windows and arches, for comparison with the dressed

stonework of those buildings, said they were not to be compared, so clean and finished were they." Thus stands the only record which attempts to bridge over the immense gulf stretching from a remote antiquity to the arrival of the British in Mashonaland. Modern investigation has proved it to have been very inaccurate, and has also discovered similar ruins, as well as gold workings, evidently of the same date, scattered over the country at present ascertained to extend from the Zambesi as far south as the Limpopo, and from Sofala, as far west as the Kalihari desert.

The Charter of the British South African Company received the assent of the Queen in Council on the fifteenth of October, 1889, and early the following year, as soon as the rainy season was over, the pioneer force, under the guidance of the well-known African hunter, Mr. F. C. Selous, started from the Macloutsie River on their northerly expedition into Mashonaland, thus traversing a route almost at right angles to and possibly crossing that of the military expeditions of the Portuguese, undertaken from the east. But how vast a change had been wrought in three centuries! Of the semi-civilized Monomotapa and his subjects no descendants remained, unless, indeed, the pusillanimous Mashonas are the remnant of the once powerful race; and the expedition, while well-armed and prepared for any emergency, reached Fort Salisbury, the termination of its toilsome journey, without firing a single shot in anger. It must not, however, be supposed that there was no danger of bloodshed; on the contrary, it was confidently asserted that not a single member of the expeditionary force would return alive. The greater part of the territory through which the pioneers had to march was dominated by the warlike Matabeles, an offshoot of the Zulu nation, who migrated from Zululand under Mzilagaze, in 1822. The Mashonas, ostensibly the owners of the land were entirely under their subjection, and when not paying actual tribute, submitted without any show of resistance to the Matabele raids, in which their young men and maidens were carried off and their old men slaughtered.

The government of the Matabeles is an absolute monarchy, centred in Lobengula, the present King, whose word is law throughout the length and breadth of his dominions. He is generally described as being intelligent and of a kind-hearted and jovial disposition, averse to cruelty unless

necessitated by the savage nature of his subjects. Speaking on the subject of cruelty one day to Mr. E. A. Maunde, he said: "You see, you white men have prisons and can lock a man up safely. I have not. What am I to do? When a man would not listen to orders, I used to have his ears cut off as being useless, but whatever their punishment they frequently repeated their offence. Now I warn them, and a knob-kerried man never repeats his offence." Lobengula has also a strong vein of humour, amply illustrated by his letter to Sir John Willoughby, who suggested, on behalf of the English Government, that the King should have an English envoy at his court to advise him as to the best methods of governing his people:

"Sir, I wish to tell you that Umshiti and Babyane have arrived with Maunde. I am thankful for the Queen's word. I have heard her Majesty's message. The messengers have spoken as my mouth. They have been very well treated. The white people are troubling me much about gold. If the Queen hears I have given away the whole country it is not so. I have no one in my country who knows how to write. I do not understand where the dispute is because I have no knowledge of writing. The Portuguese say that Mashonaland is theirs, but it is not so. It is all Umziligazis' country. I hear now that it belongs to the Portuguese. With regard to her Majesty's offer to send me an envoy or resident, I thank her Majesty, but I do not need an officer to be sent. I will ask for one when I am pressed for want of one. I thank the Queen for the word which my messengers give me by mouth, that the Queen says I am not to let any one dig for gold in my country except to dig for me as my servants. I greet her Majesty cordially."

The two messengers referred to, Umshiti and Babyane, were the envoys who accompanied Mr. Maunde to England in 1888, and whose accounts of their visit to the country of the Great White Queen were so graphically described by him to the Geographical Society. Lobengula is personally well-disposed towards English colonists, but has great difficulty in keeping the turbulent section of his people in order. The younger Matabeles vehemently advocated the extermination of the whites, and this fact was probably answerable for the belief that the English would be annihilated.

Previous to the entering by the Pioneers

of a narrow pass seven miles in length, and eminently suitable for an ambushade, a message came from Lobengula peremptorily forbidding any further advance, coupled with the threat of attack if his orders were not complied with. Colonel Pennyfather, the commander of the expedition, determined to press on notwithstanding; and a few days afterwards a private communication was received from Lobengula stating that his first message was necessitated by the attitude of his young men, but that he himself was friendly and would do all in his power to prevent hostilities.

Probably what some of his young men saw in camp helped in a great measure to cool the ardour of the turbulent sections. When darkness fell, the electric search-light got to work, and a waggon cover being utilised as a target, it was speedily torn to shreds by the hail of bullets from the Maxim gun. The expedition advanced until September the twelfth, when it finally halted, and the Colonel decided to build a fort, which was called Fort Salisbury, the most northerly settlement of the South African Company, the total distance from the Macloutsie River, three hundred and eighty miles, being traversed in sixty-eight days.

The present town of Salisbury is situated on the Mashonaland plateau at an altitude of over four thousand feet above the sea level. Its geographical position is $17^{\circ} 54' S.$ and $31^{\circ} 21' E.$ It is the seat of the government and the present terminus of telegraphic communication from the south. Close by there is a little wooded hill called the Kopje, on which a new fort has been erected. It commands the town and the country for miles round.

The capital, like the townships of Victoria and Umtali, is laid out on the American principle, the streets and avenues crossing each other at right angles. The thoroughfares are broad—Jamieson Avenue, in which are the Government buildings, having a width of a hundred and fifty feet, and though it is still grass-grown in places, and no attempt has been made at paving, it is speedily acquiring a pretentious appearance. Brick houses with iron roofs are rapidly displacing the old round Kaffir huts made of upright poles, plastered with mud, and grass-thatched roofs, the only habitations during the early days of the settlement. In laying out the town the future of Salisbury has not been forgotten: no trees are

allowed to be cut down within a radius of three miles.

The foresight of the Chartered Company in this respect compares favourably with that of most early settlers, who ruthlessly demolished the forests to supply timber for building purposes. As all goods had to come by bullock-waggon from Kimberley, a distance of nearly a thousand miles, the first venturesome traders who appeared on the scene obtained extravagant prices for their goods. At one time jam fetched six shillings a pound, butter twelve shillings a pound, and salt, often an unattainable luxury, a shilling a pound. A year afterwards, when Lord Randolph Churchill had his sale, prices were still very high, but now there are two or three big trading companies, as well as several stores where almost anything can be obtained at fairly reasonable prices, considering the expense of transport. Copper coins are unknown as a circulating medium. Sixpence is the lowest tender, so that, curiously enough, a box of matches costs as much as a pound of beef. The spiritual needs of the growing community have not been neglected. The Church of England, the Roman Catholics, and Methodists have each a place of worship, the latter body possessing one of the best built brick buildings in Salisbury. Even the Salvation Army is represented by a contingent with a band, whose rude music in lieu of anything better is duly appreciated. There is also a hospital managed excellently, and the Roman Catholic sisters, under the Superioress Mother Patrick, are idolised for their self-sacrificing devotion to the sick.

The government of the country which an intending colonist chooses as his future home is of more importance than he usually imagines. Englishmen, who have long enjoyed the blessings of liberty, are naturally prone to suppose that the laws which work so admirably at home will be found of equal efficacy in a new country. In this belief they are woefully at fault. Given a mixed white population placed in the midst of an uncivilised native race, whose only law is the whim of their chieftain, or the exigencies of the hour, it is impossible to determine offences against property or persons in the spirit that prevails in our English courts. It is to the credit of the South African Company that they have realised this, and have instituted Roman-Dutch law, which has been so successful a civilising medium

wherever adopted. The administration may be accurately defined as a parental despotism, the decision of Dr. Jamieson, the administrator, being final in all matters. Necessary, no doubt, as an administration of this kind is in a new colony, the tendency towards an English judicature is becoming every day more apparent, and trial by jury, which is being agitated for by a large section of the community, will no doubt be instituted when the increase of the English population renders it advisable.

Shortly after the site of the capital had been determined, the fascinating pursuit of gold prospecting engrossed the attention of a great number of the inhabitants, and prospective millionaires travelled north, south, east, and west, to the goldfields which surround Salisbury. Many of these are situated at a great distance, and, as may be imagined, journeying thither was sometimes very arduous and fraught with no little danger. Roads were soon made to the houses of the Mining Commissioners, situated in the centre of the more important goldfields, and along these routes little difficulty is experienced. A Scotch cart, dragged by oxen, can be used, and supplies transported from head-quarters in some quantities. But many of the goldfields lie out of the direction of these roads, and in crossing the Veldt pack-donkeys have to take the place of the Scotch cart. Even donkeys, however, have to be abandoned in what is popularly known as the "fly" country; as the tsetse fly is fatal to all animals. Kaffirs have then to carry the supplies, and necessities alone can be taken. Necessaries may roughly be said to consist of blankets, tea, coffee, salt, sugar, boer-meal, matches, and cartridges. For some time donkeys were supposed to be capable of resisting the effects of the tsetse poison, but this has been proved to be a fallacy, although they have been known to survive a year. The tsetse is of a greyish colour, and slightly larger than our common house-fly. The bite acts in a very singular manner. After an animal has been bitten or "stuck," as it is called, no bad effects appear until it rains or the animal gets thoroughly wet; then in a few days the coat appears rough and staring, the victim becomes emaciated, and eventually dies from weakness. The fly appears to follow the large game, especially buffalo, and as these are rapidly disappearing it is becoming less formidable, and is chiefly confined to the low-lying dis-

tricts. The Mashonas dry and pound the fly and administer it to their dogs as a prophylactic.

When making long journeys it is usual for parties of two or three to go together, as the Kaffirs cannot be relied on in cases of sickness or danger, and will run away at the earliest opportunity. There have been many instances of natives stealing the blankets and gun of a prospector when attacked by illness and abandoning him on the Veldt. The Matabeles and the Mashonas are the Kaffirs usually employed by the whites. Another tribe called the Shanghaans, who come from the Portuguese territory, are also employed sometimes. The Shanghaans are the finest race, physically, finer even than the Matabeles, who have been contaminated by intermarriage with the Mashonas. The Shanghaans command with the Matabeles higher wages than the Mashonas, obtaining, as a rule, a pound a month and their food, while the Mashonas only receive a blanket. The ingratitude of Kaffirs is, perhaps, their most trying characteristic. They are willing and strong workers if properly looked after, but if you indulge them, overpay them, or give them presents, they become lazy and impudent at once. They consider such indulgence foolishness on your part, and will often look at a present disdainfully, saying, "Pecanini"—little. The wonderful machinery brought to their notice for the first time by the whites astonished the Kaffirs greatly. They marvel much at the power of the steam engines, the saw-mills, and the gold-mills, but are chiefly astonished at the fact that they can go on working night and day and require neither food nor rest.

The horses of the expedition also excited great interest, which perhaps is not so remarkable when we recollect that the animal was unknown in South Africa until the arrival of the Dutch and English; Dingiwayo, who is generally regarded as the founder of the Zulu military system, having owed much of his prestige to the fact that he returned to his dominions mounted on an English cavalry horse which he had received as a present at Cape Town in 1797; no such animal having been previously seen in Zululand.

A remarkable theory to account for the rising and setting of the sun is current amongst some of the natives. They believe that he descends at night into the

Zambesi, floats down with the current to the "Big Waters," whence he rises the following morning. They account for the greater duration of day during the summer months—the rainy season—by the fact that the Zambesi is flooded, and so carries the sun quicker to the sea.

Lions are seldom met with in Mashonaland—indeed, very few of the settlers have seen any. Even Mr. Selous was three years living almost entirely in the wilderness, where lions are plentiful, and yet never caught sight of one. Being nocturnal animals, they lie sleeping during the day in beds of reeds, or in the long grass, and it is only when night falls that they begin to prowl, usually in companies of four or five at a time. It is a common mistake to suppose that they roar when in pursuit of prey. When so engaged they make a low, purring noise, which appears to come from a distance, but which in reality may be quite close; the roaring, on the other hand, is an indication that they have satisfied their hunger. Lying half asleep on the Veldt, with no covering but a blanket, the low, purring sound of these animals is anything but pleasant. It is not an uncommon one, however, and inured by habit and overcome by fatigue, one drops off to sleep in spite of the danger.

The rivers in Mashonaland literally swarm with crocodiles. Some casualties have occurred through these monsters; but it is generally believed that they are only dangerous during the rainy season, when, owing to the muddiness of the waters, they are unable to catch the fish they feed upon. They are very quick in detecting the presence of a human being, and can be seen to glide off the rocks into the water hundreds of yards distant.

One of the most terrible dangers in these unexplored regions is getting lost on the Veldt. Mr. Selous has described his experiences in his well-known book, "A Hunter's Wanderings in South Africa"; and since the expedition of the Pioneers similar experiences have been undergone, sometimes with much more fatal results. In journeying from the camp, often for weeks at a time, one has to depend for food chiefly on one's rifle, and it is easy in the ardour of the chase to lose one's bearings. So long as you have a Kaffir with you there is no trouble, but if you happen to be alone, and have not taken your bearings by the sun with sufficient

accuracy, the results may be fatal, or if not fatal, sometimes even worse. Instances have been known of men going mad through being lost in this manner.

One man who was on his way from the Macloutais River to Fort Salisbury with the hospital sisters left the road on a short shooting excursion. He was missing forty-two days, and was then found by two Boer hunters seventy-five miles from the road. When discovered he was living in a hole in the ground near some water, which he was afraid to leave, and seemed quite demented. He eventually recovered, and is now at Salisbury. He said he remembered nothing after the first five days, during which time he had lived on two partridges which he had shot. It is believed that the rest of the time he must have subsisted on "Kloppers," or Kaffir oranges, the fruit of the mapole-tree. They are somewhat larger than our oranges, with an external rind as hard as horn, and contain a thick liquid of an acid-sweet taste.

Although the colonisation and development of the country have chiefly depended, and will probably depend for some time to come, on its mineral wealth, the agricultural resources offer the fairest prospects in the future. Mashonaland is an extensive tableland, well watered throughout owing to its position between the Zambesi and Crocodile Rivers. It is from three to five thousand feet above the sea level, and its area is nearly equal to that of Germany. In the valleys the natives, without effort, raise large crops of "mealies," or Indian corn, Kaffir corn, rice, pumpkins, potatoes, and tobacco; whilst oats and other cereals have been successfully cultivated by the whites. Vineyards have also been started, and most of our English fruit-trees, as well as oranges, lemons, and bananas, should thrive here. Cotton and coffee, it is supposed, would do very well, but neither has been cultivated as yet.

The native cattle are small and not very useful for draught purposes, but are excellent milkers. Nearly all the draught oxen are of the colonial breed, while others are brought from Matabeleland for the purposes of slaughter. Sheep-farming has not yet been attempted, and its success is considered doubtful. The Kaffirs have both sheep and goats, but they are of a smaller size than those known to us. It is remarkable that the domestic animals of the natives are all smaller than ours, probably the effects of in-breeding.

Fowls, for instance, are about the size of partridges, and their eggs are correspondingly small. The best farmers in the country are the Boers, and the Chartered Company is anxious to get as many of them as possible to settle in Mashonaland. Persons to whom the company grants farms are allowed to peg out fifteen hundred "morgen," or a little more than three thousand acres, in any part of the country, with the exception of known gold-fields, or within three miles of a township. A number of Boers have pegged out farms in this manner which are in a flourishing condition. They are shy, however, of settling under any government, preferring the independent life to which they have been accustomed. Although a fine sturdy race and the descendants of the original "boor-trekkers" of South Africa, the Boers are very illiterate, and it is as much as some of the older ones can do to sign their own names. This feat is an event in their lives, and is accompanied by befitting solemnity. An instance occurred when a Boer farmer had to sign an important document. After much difficulty he obtained pen and ink, and the "vrow" arranged the room with care, putting the chairs and tables in their places as if for an important event. She then led her old man to the table and settled him comfortably. This done, in a stentorian voice she shouted to her progeny in Dutch: "Children, children, go outside; father will sign his name!"

The country is well wooded, though the trees are not large, except on the banks of rivers. There are vast forests of the *kompani*, a hard wood, very useful for building purposes, while the bark tans leather excellently. It is supposed to be capable of withstanding the depredations of the white ants, and this would render it very valuable, as these insects play sorry havoc with timber, as well as proving an occasional pest to the farmer. They would be a greater annoyance to him, but luckily prefer sandy to alluvial soils. These white ants are one of the most remarkable features in the natural history of Mashonaland. They build immense mounds of an iron-grey colour, sometimes covered with vegetation, which are as hard as cement. In the neighbourhood of the Hunyani River these anthills frequently attain the dimensions of a small cottage. They generally have one or two openings on the top, about eight or nine inches wide, but curiously enough the ants are never

seen on the outside of their dwellings. Sometimes they build round large trees, which seem to be growing out of the ant-hills. When they attack an object they generally do so on the side not exposed to the light. They are great pests, and have often been known to destroy a pair of boots in a single night. They are very destructive to tents, riddling all parts which touch the ground. Leather, blankets, wood, hardly anything except metal is safe from them. When they attack a tree they do so by building a tunnel of clay up the side, which screens them from the light and also protects their bodies, which are remarkably soft, from their numerous enemies.

In all tropical and sub-tropical regions climatic conditions are of the utmost importance to the would-be colonist. In this respect Mashonaland is especially fortunate. Owing to the great elevation of the tableland it is infinitely more healthy than the low-lying Portuguese territory along the coast. For eight months in the year, from April to November, the air is dry and invigorating. During the winter months, May, June, and July, although the thermometer may register eighty degrees in the shade at noon, it becomes very cold at night. The hottest months in the year are September and October, just before the commencement of the rainy season, but even then, owing to the dryness of the atmosphere, the evenings and mornings are cool and pleasant. During October it is necessary to thoroughly overhaul the thatch of the huts, which gets chopped to pieces by the rats during the dry season. If this be neglected, the entire roof is in danger of being washed away, so violent are the tropical rains, which, here as elsewhere in these latitudes, are accompanied by terrific thunderstorms.

In spite of the natural resources of the country, and the favourable climate, one great drawback to its colonisation has hitherto existed owing to the difficulties of transport—all goods having to be brought from the south by bullock-waggon, as the country between Salisbury and the east coast is infested by the tsetse. This drawback will shortly cease to exist. The Chartered Company are in the act of building a railway through this region which will probably be finished in the course of the year. Mashonaland will then have an outlet to the sea at Beira, which lies only three hundred miles east of Salisbury, thus

rendering easily accessible a new country, eminently suitable for British colonisation, and well calculated to relieve the pressure of our teeming population at home.

WITH THE SMUGGLERS.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

THE news of Pochet's arrest caused great lamentation at Sugny; not so much out of sympathy with him, as on account of the blow it gave to the "fraudeurs" trade. There were a few surmises as the chance of Léon Regnault keeping his pledge to Pauline, but that was a mere side issue of no importance in comparison with the difficulty of finding another accomplice as shrewd and daring as old Pochet.

"My tobacco is drying grand this year," said old Servais dolefully one evening a little later as we sat in the bar at Regnault's. "I never smelt anything finer. But what's the use if it all has to be sold inland?"

"Ay, indeed," said another, "the best leaf will be a mere drug in all the markets we can get to. If they'd only left us Pochet for another six weeks."

Then some one turned to me:

"And you, Jules, who were in such a hurry to be first in the field with your bargain. You haven't gained much."

"Just given yourself the trouble of making two bargains instead of one," grunted Servais, "that's all."

"You're out there," I said; "the bargain I made holds good. It wasn't made with Pochet at all."

"Not with Pochet!" they all cried at once; "then with whom was it?"

"With Lambert of the Café Marteau, by Sedan," I replied.

"Was it a good one?" I was asked.

As I told the price Lambert had agreed to pay me, there was a murmur of applause.

"He's wide awake, is our Jules," said my father, "for all he's so quiet."

"But, lad," said Servais, who was an authority on such matters, "it'll be sharp practice to smuggle half a hundred of tobacco into the banlieue of Sedan."

"It's not a job for a fool," I replied; "but, you see, the douaniers will count on our being frightened by Pochet's capture. They won't be expecting us to run anything just yet. I shall take advantage of that, and get it through on Thursday morning."

"Thursday morning? Not by daylight?"

"Yes, by daylight," I replied. "The bolder the better."

My father shook his head.

"You'll run your neck into a noose, Jules," he said.

"I don't think I shall," I answered. "I think I'm pretty safe. I was at the mill to-day, and I found that the miller's big Flanders horse has died of old age. I've promised the miller to take the carcase and sell it for him at the shambles in Sedan."

They all understood. Carcasses of animals had, from time to time, played an important part in a case of "fraude"; and never, as yet, had they attracted suspicion. I was warmly congratulated on my luck in having secured such a rare thing as a dead horse, and much envied also.

The next day we packed the precious freight carefully and neatly into its strange receptacle; then we placed it on the top of a load of old iron which my father had to send into Sedan. There was positively no outward trace of the valuable cargo which was stowed away under the gaunt sides of the great unwieldy carcase; on that point I was quite satisfied, even without the opinion of Regnault and Servais, and others who were accustomed to the unexpected ways of excisemen. Nevertheless, the satisfaction I felt was by no means complete. I had no doubts as to the success of my bold plan, still I was restless and anxious, and when all was in readiness for my start the following morning, I wandered off into the forest to try and get rid of my uncomfortable feeling. The fact was, the tacit promise I had given Pauline about smuggling kept on torturing me continually. Was it really a promise, or was it not? At the moment I put my sample of tobacco back into my pocket, I had meant her to understand that I was going to turn over a new leaf. Well, such was my intention still. What I was about to do was not really a breach of faith. When I had suggested M^{lle} Letellier as an advocate for her father, I had fancied that he would plead without a fee. When I had found out my mistake, I had not had the heart to let her suffer through it. If I had sent my tobacco to Liège I should have realized barely two-thirds of what Lambert was going to pay me, and even with Lambert's price and all my savings I should still have to borrow twenty francs to make up the sum for which I had rendered myself responsible.

In my second interview with the socialist

lawyer he had explained to me that, though he sometimes made a free gift of his eloquence, there must be something in the case to justify his liberality; whereas, he should seriously compromise his reputation if he identified himself so completely with such an ignoble cause as that of an over-reaching smuggler. The sentence, he told me, would be probably ten years' penal servitude, which for a man of Pochet's age and habits would be virtually for life. If, therefore, I considered his fee too high, little would be lost by my refusing to pay it. But I had stuck to my first decision, and surely Pauline would overlook the means when she thought of the end. Still my promise worried me, and all the salve I could lay on my conscience did not bring me comfort. Now, under the circumstances, it would seem more likely that I should have avoided Pauline than that I should have sought her; a kind of impulse, however, led me straight to the Café Pochet. The longing to see her honest eyes raised gratefully to me as to her only friend, overcame the fear of the questions she might ask me. On the bench outside the door, in the twilight, sat Pauline; at the sound of my step she sprang up.

"Ah, Jules," she said, "it is you at last. Why have you not been here before?"

I faltered out excuses—I had been busy. I had not known she would be expecting me. She looked at me half-reproachfully.

"And had you nothing to tell me of all that passed between you and the lawyer?"

So I had to repeat to her my interview with Maître Letellier, and to try to word my account so as not to tell her what was absolutely untrue. Yet I did deceive her, and my heart smote me for it, most of all when at the end she took my hand in both of hers and raised it to her lips, without speaking, and I heard a sort of sob. Then, I scarce know how it was, but I found myself trying to speak to her of the great love I had borne her so long, and when words would not come freely enough, I folded my arms about her, and drew her, without any resistance on her part, close to me. She murmured something which I did not hear, but still we understood one another, and our joy seemed purer and more sacred in that sweet silence, which seems like an eternity when I look back upon it.

Suddenly a step sounded on the road, and a jeering laugh made me start to my feet. There, close in front of me, with

pale face and angry eyes, stood Léon Regnault.

For a moment I changed places with him in fancy, and pitied him accordingly, but at his first words my pity melted away.

"Confound your impudence!" he cried. "I've tracked you, you see, and now I want to know what you mean."

"My meaning is plain enough," I retorted. "Moreover, you have no right to ask it in that tone."

"I shall ask it in any tone I choose," he said. "I ask you again what right you have to come sneaking here to make love to the girl who is to be my wife?"

"Sneaking!" I cried, losing my temper. "You, who follow and spy on me, are the sneak; you, who tell lies about your relations to the girl I mean to marry, are the sneak. It is I who demand an explanation from you."

He raised his clenched fist, and I stood ready for him. I longed for his blow to fall that I might begin to punish him as he deserved. But Pauline was too quick for us. She placed herself between us, and looking from one to the other, said:

"Jules—Monsieur Léon, please let me speak. I am not worth a quarrel. It would be dreadful if you fought for my sake. Besides, there is no promise between me and you, Monsieur Léon; I told you long ago that I could not be bound by what my father had said. He was afraid of offending you, and he tried to persuade me. He was sadly afraid of you, but I should never have given way, and now that he has no longer anything to fear I feel quite free. But do not be angry; there are many better girls than I am. I am not worth a quarrel."

She spoke so straightforwardly that he ought to have felt the justice of her words, but perhaps it was hard on him. His face grew paler still.

"I have been made a fool of," he hissed, "and I suppose you think you've got the better of me, but let those laugh who win; perhaps I shall have a chance of making a fool of one of you before long, and then you may look out."

Then he turned away and walked off among the trees in the direction of home.

The next morning at daybreak I started on my venture. I whistled merrily as I drove along the high road to Sedan, partly because it was best to look quite gay and innocent, and partly because my heart was overflowing with happiness and joy. My

scruples and doubts had all vanished. Pauline really loved me; what I was doing was for love of her. I was sure she would forgive me if she knew.

By seven o'clock I was in front of the douane, and half-a-dozen officials were carefully and noisily inspecting my freight. I submitted without uneasiness; my precautions were all so well taken that I feared nothing. When, after a long examination, I was allowed to proceed, I bade them a civil "bon jour," I felt so happy that I could afford to be friendly with any one, even a douanier. Then I resumed my day-dreams at the point where they had been broken off. We had spoken of our future the previous evening—after Léon had gone—vaguely, but still as of a future to be spent together. For that future I would now begin to plan, and work, and save.

The Café Marteau, the little estaminet I had visited after my interview with Maître Letellier, took me almost by surprise when I reached it. I drove into the yard behind the house, and there Lambert helped me to carry the horse's carcase into the stables, and to unpack and weigh out my successful "fraude." There was no one about, yet we spoke little, for walls have ears, and birds can carry tales.

"Twenty-four kilos, good measure," I said, when the last packet was laid on the scales; "and you'll pocket thirty per cent. on it, for finer leaf is not to be found."

"I hope I may," said Lambert; "but you've made a tight bargain."

He pulled out a handful of notes as he spoke.

"Let's settle here," he said. "We are quieter."

"Sorry to interrupt," said a voice at the door, "but it is my painful duty to remind you that as this tobacco has paid no excise, it is confiscate to the Government of the French Republic."

Yes, there they were, the douaniers whom I had left behind so confidently an hour before. There they were, with mocking, triumphant faces, and one was laying his hand on my shoulder.

"Jules Bridoux, you incur a fine of one hundred francs; in default of payment you will be lodged in Sedan gaol." Then he turned to Lambert. "We've had our eye on you for some time, too. We let this load pass just to make sure of you." Then Lambert's fine was assessed, and when he had paid it and begged hard not to have

his license cancelled, I was marched off between two douaniers, back along the road I had come—back to Sugny like a beaten hound, with my heart full of dismay and despair.

Nearly all the village, young and old, stood round with compassionate faces while I paid out the last son of my savings to the unrelenting douaniers.

"There's treachery somewhere," said old Servais, when the officials had gone, "treachery and foul play. The countryside is going to the dogs."

"But who would betray Jules?" said my father. "Who could have a grudge against a quiet lad like him?"

I said nothing. I walked into the Auberge Regnault and looked round.

"Where is Léon?" I asked.

"He's gone over to Charleville to his uncle's," was the answer.

"Then you'd best tell him to stop there," I replied, "for the day he shows his face here again he'll have a long reckoning to settle with me."

I did not give them time to answer, but went out again, and before evening every one knew that Léon Regnault and I had quarrelled the previous night, and that he had taken his revenge.

"It's like cutting off his nose to spite his face," said some one, in the torrent of vituperation that followed the report. "What can a man of Sugny expect who has had dealings with the douane?"

The next thing to be done was to see Maître Letellier. All might yet go well if he would consent to wait a little for his fee. But on this point I found him inexorable. In fact, as he informed me, he was not sorry to have a valid reason for recalling a promise which he had made in the teeth of his better judgement.

"Besides," he added, "Pochet will probably require no defence. He is, I hear, very ill in prison from the effects of the fight at the time of his capture."

So there was the end of all my great scheme. My savings were spent, and my tobacco lost; still I was not completely cast down. Pauline and I were plighted lovers. If troubles were thickening round her my love would be the more necessary to her, and since she was mine I did not grudge what I had lost in her service.

It was not till the afternoon of the day following my misfortune that I found myself free to go to her. She would, probably, have heard nothing of what had happened until I told her myself. I

imagined how my failure would serve her as a moral to point the lecture she had already given me. If she scolded me, I would bear it quietly; but surely when she knew all she would not be very angry.

At the door of the Café Pochet I heard the children's voices within clamouring and crying. A voice—not that of Pauline—was raised to enforce peace and order. I opened the door. A woman, whom I had never seen, looked at me enquiringly as I entered.

"It is Jules Bridoux, ma tante," said the eldest child, by way of explanation.

"Is Pauline gone out?" I asked—why did it all look so strange?

"Pauline has gone right away," wailed the children in chorus. "She went early this morning."

"Has she gone to her father?" I asked.

"That's no one's business but her own," replied the stranger ungraciously. "However, as you're Jules Bridoux, this letter must be for you. She left it to be sent to Sugny; you'd have got it to-morrow."

She spoke in a hard, unsympathetic manner. I asked no further questions, but bidding her good day, turned to go. I wanted to read my letter—to know the reason of Pauline's strange, sudden absence, to see how she would address me, to gladden my heart with any phrase that I could construe into tenderness. But when, outside in the silence of the forest, I had torn the envelope open, I read its contents through and through before the meaning grew clear to my bewildered senses. And this was what I read on the sheet which I had kissed as I unfolded it, because it was my first love-letter:

"I'm not much of a letter-writer, Jules," she wrote; "this is only a few lines to bid you good-bye. After what I said to you that night before father was took, you can't expect me to have any more to do with you. I couldn't ever trust you again now you've broken a promise like that. That's why I'm gone away. Most likely we shall never see one another again, but if we do, there must be no more said about what's been between us. That's all over, and I expect I shall never feel so happy again. But I'm not to blame. I'm true to my word if you aren't.—PAULINE."

That was all—she had left me—given me up, and without giving me the chance

of explaining myself. In my first movement of helpless rage I crushed her letter in my hands, then I smoothed it out and kissed it, and the hot tears ran down my cheeks and blurred the cruel words.

I can scarcely say how the days went after that. I made no attempt to track Pauline. After all, she was right; I had deceived her, and if her trust in me was gone, we were better apart.

Then we heard that Pochet's illness was going badly; but even that had no importance to me. I barely wondered if Pauline knew that his chance of being defended by Maître Letellier was gone. I had lost all interest in everything. My neighbours thought it was because my smuggling misadventure had depressed me. I let them believe what they chose. Naturally, the license of the Café Pochet had been forfeited, and people had come to consider it as a natural result of things that the talked-of marriage between Pauline and Léon Regnault should be spoken of no more. Old Regnault tried to insinuate that Léon's uncle at Charleville wanted his nephew to marry and settle there; but the tale did not meet with credence. We knew that he had other reasons for keeping away from Sugny.

So the autumn wore on, till it was time to plough the land which had borne my ill-fated crop of tobacco.

"I shall grow corn next year," I said to myself, as I followed the plough drearily up and down the damp furrows. "I shall keep my faith to Pauline better than she thinks."

Then I thought bitterly of the long years that lay before me to spend without her. As to loving another woman in her place, that thought never entered my head.

"Jules Bridoux," called a voice across the field, breaking in upon my melancholy reverie, "here is a letter for thee. I may as well give it thee now as carry it down to the village."

It was the postman on his daily round. I hurried to meet him across the field—a letter was a rare event in my life. I looked at the address, written in a stiff, careful handwriting. Did my eyes deceive, or was it really from Pauline? My hands trembled as I opened it. Yes, there at the end of a few short lines stood her name.

"DEAR JULES," it ran, "it is very bold of me to ask you to forgive me. I was all in the wrong. It is too long to write,

and I could tell you easier ; only perhaps you are too angry to come and hear what I have to say.—PAULINE."

Angry—too angry ! Well, yes, I had been angry ; but if she was ready to say she had been in the wrong, if all that had been crooked was to be made straight, what was the use of being angry ? I sent my little brother home with the horse and plough and went straight as I was to the quondam inn at the cross-roads.

I found her where we had parted all those weeks before, on the bench outside the door. She looked even paler than of old, and she was in mourning. She rose as I came, and held out both her hands to me.

"Ah, Jules," she said, "you are a hundred times better than I am, and I judged you so hardly."

I tried to tell her that I had forgiven her, that so long as she was ready to come to me the past was no more than a dream. Then she began her tale.

"You have heard of father's illness," she said, "and perhaps you have heard how it has ended ?"

She touched her black dress and went on tremulously :

"He was buried a few days ago. I had taken a place as servant in Sedan, but I left it to nurse him when at last he got leave to have me. When it was all over, I began to try and think of all I ought to do to put matters straight, and first of all I went to that lawyer whom you told me of. When I said I had come to tell him that though father would not need his services I should like to thank him, he stared at me in great surprise ; then he asked me a number of questions, and I could see that though I was in such trouble he was angry with me. Then he told me that there must be some mistake somewhere, for that he had refused to plead the case ; at which I was greatly surprised. 'You were not going to plead, monsieur ?' I exclaimed. 'No,' he replied, 'and if you want to know any more about the matter, you had better ask the young man who undertook to raise the fee, and then found himself unable to do so.' Then he bade me good morning, and I could not ask him any more. And now, Jules," she continued, in the straightforward way I knew so well, "will you tell me the part of the story I do not understand ? I can guess it, but I had rather hear it from you."

So I told her all, from the very beginning, how I had made the mistake about Maître Letellier ; how the longing to serve her had tempted me to break my new-made resolution ; how Léon's treachery had ruined my plan ; and how, when I had come to tell her all, I had found that she had heard already, and had misinterpreted what she had heard. I cut her short when she began to reproach herself and to beg me to forgive her. We understood one another now, and why should we not bury the trouble that had parted us ?

My parents took more kindly to my betrothed wife than I expected. Indeed, now that Pochet was dead, there was nothing they could urge against her.

We were married about a year later, and at Pauline's desire I left Sugny and all its temptations behind. Since I have moved further from the border I have devoted myself more and more to bee-keeping, till now, I am proud to say, I am considered quite an authority on the subject.

There is certainly less risk in my present employment than in running contraband goods, and bees are, on the whole, less difficult to deal with than douaniers. As to the profits, Pauline, who keeps the accounts, assures me that they are something remarkable. The men of Sugny, however, shake their heads at me as a renegade, while the children in their play still serve their earliest apprenticeship as "fraudeurs."

MAYDAY.

COMPARED with the Mayday of the poets, and with that depicted by the annalists of ancient sports and customs, the Mayday of our present era shows a curious contrast. "Preparations for Mayday," which formed the headline of paragraphs in the daily papers of last year, have no connection with maypoles, garlands, morris dancers, or festive milkmaids. The preparations are in the way of massing troops and police about the chief public resorts of the capital cities of the Continent. We even read of a Spanish squadron of an ironclad and three cruisers, as ordered to the scene of apprehended disturbances. For, last year, as Mayday fell on a Sunday, the conjunction was deemed ominous of danger to public security. The day has been adopted by general consent as the great labour festival of the year, and as the

anarchists of the Continent were expected to take advantage of the occasion to develop their peculiar and explosive methods, a rather lively time was looked forward to by those having the charge of public security.

In Paris an amusing brochure, largely sold in the streets on Mayday, burlesqued the uneasy anticipations of timid souls. The morning opens with dynamite explosions, and the destruction of public monuments; at noon there follows "explosion of the sun and universal darkness," eventually succeeded by a general reconciliation of all classes, rather superfluous under circumstances such as our poet Pope seems to have foreseen:

Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And universal darkness buries all.

But Paris, like Vienna and Berlin, bristled with soldiers, ready for all emergencies, but kept carefully out of sight. Nothing happened on that occasion, nothing ever does when it is expected to; but then the weather was unfavourable for popular commotions, the elements fought for society, and rough and rainy weather kept the dangerous people at home.

But it is curious to note that Mayday, apart from its floral and festive celebrations, had always on its popular side a trace about it of the spirit of revolt. It is the general holiday of labour, of the ploughman, of the milkmaid, of the chimney-sweep, as representatives of the lowest ranks in the social hierarchy, when they took occasion, in whatever merry guise, to levy a kind of blackmail, or ransom, from their overlords and other superiors. Robin Hood is the hero of the day, who, in the popular mythology, is the champion of the poor against the rich, of the peasant against the lord, of those who want against those who have. The mummers as they went about masquerading—the boldest and sprightliest as Robin Hood, the native humorist as Friar Tuck, and the pretty village lass as Maid Marian—bore themselves with all the pride of outlaws and free foresters, to whom the game laws were a dead letter, while for once they fared like their betters,

Feasting on pheasant, river fowl, and swan,
With Robin at their head and Marian,

That Mayday, even in the sixteenth century, was regarded with some apprehension by the ruling powers is evident from what occurred upon what is known as Evil Mayday in 1517. Always in the city of London, the festival of May had

been kept up with due celebration. The great city maypole,

The Great Shaft of Cornhill,

as Chaucer has it, was raised each year over against the church of St. Andrew, called undershaft from that circumstance, with a general outpouring of popular clamour and rejoicing. But in 1517 there was a popular grievance, widely felt, in the encouragement given to aliens attracted to England by the wealth of a sumptuous court, who undersold the traders and craftsmen of the city, and Mayday brought about a great assemblage of London 'prentices who hunted out these aliens and destroyed their workshops, making a great riot in the city, which was eventually quelled with much bloodshed and cruelty; and some two thousand young fellows were captured and sent to King Harry at Westminster, with ropes about their necks, and might have been hanged for their Mayday sports, but that Queen Catherine, whose influence was still paramount with the young King, begged their lives, and sent them away rejoicing.

But never after that year was the city maypole raised, for henceforth the fathers of the city discountenanced the gathering of young people, hot-headed and mutinous, on that especial day, and if there existed any chance of the revival of the Mayday festival it was presently extinguished by the rising flood of Puritanism. The preachers denounced the maypole as idolatrous, and the elders, nothing loth, cut it in pieces and chopped it up for firewood.

But if there was an element of popular discontent in the rougher Mayday assemblages, surely there is something charming in its floral celebrations, and the mirthful gathering of the may by young men and maids half-intoxicated with the balmy breath of spring, and rejoicing in the fresh morning air as they dance over the dew-spangled meads. It is pleasant to read of King Harry as he rides out a-maying, in his joyous youth, with Queen Catherine at his side, and many a lord and lady gay; how they rode from Greenwich Palace to Shooters Hill over the dark heath and golden common, and with what a glorious view in the fine May morning from that unrivalled summit. There they meet Robin Hood and two hundred archers all in green, who shoot off flights of whistling arrows for their delectation, and afterwards entertain their monarch and his friends with archers' fare, wine and venison, laid out in some rural

harbour. The Aldermen and Sheriffs of London also go a-maying in Stepney Wood, and poet Lydgate is up in time to send them, by a pursuivant, a poem of sixteen staves in metre royal.

The ancient Court of France, too, had its Mayday customs; the may was cut in the Bois de Boulogne and the Royal Palace adorned with the branches. The goldsmiths of Paris, too, presented a bough of white may each year to the altar of Notre Dame. Yet in France Mayday till recently has not counted for much; nor is it a special festival with the Celtic races. Welsh folk-lore has little to say to it; and although in Ireland it was held sacred to the fairies, yet no special celebration attached to it. But one curious legend relates that on Mayday King O'Donoghue, the Irish Arthur, rides forth in full panoply from one of the lakes of Killarney, as if expecting that at some time or other his countrymen would be wanting him on that particular day.

But with us English the former importance of the festival has left numerous traces. Why the sweeps in particular should have kept up the Mayday mummery is an insoluble mystery. But even at this day pretended sweeps dress up and make a shift to get a few coppers, while the master sweep in his smart little pony-cart drives by and smiles compassionately at the display. For the sweep of to-day is on a very different footing from those described in the "Gent's Magazine": "The late benevolent Mrs. Montagu"—famous for her feather hangings, of which Cowper sings:

The birds put off their every hue
To dress a room for Montagu

—"gave for many years on Mayday an entertainment at her house in Portman Square to that unfortunate class of miserable objects, the chimney-sweepers of the metropolis. Roast beef and plum-pudding was followed by a dance, and a shilling at departure." The story went that Mrs. Montagu had lost a child, who had been stolen by the sweeps, and that her feast was given in hopes of one day recognising her missing offspring; as in Montgomery's ballad:

"Hark! hark!" she cried; the wind appeared to sleep.

Again poor Edwin shouted, "Sweep! sweep! sweep!"

"My child! my child!" she cried, with transports wild,

"Oh, Heaven, it is—it is my child, my child!"

Somehow a little bit of the romance of

life has gone out with the abolition of climbing boys. There was a thrill in the sight of a sweep, with poor Edwin's fate recalled to the childish mind by nurse's solemn warnings. And the Mayday celebration, with its barbaric music, and its mysterious Jack-in-the-green, when, with other strange figures, some grinning black fellow would represent the foul fiend and drive lads and lasses screaming before him, was a thing to move the stoutest heart.

The Mayday of the milkmaids has vanished altogether from public notice with the milkmaids themselves, and the milkwomen, who within living memory were the chief retailers of milk in the London streets, and who kept up some observance of Mayday to the last. Probably there is no parish in England where the pleasant custom of choosing a May Queen is still observed, and although not many years ago a maypole was one of the ornaments of a village-green in Sherwood Forest, the villagers were far too staid and self-respecting to join hands and dance round in a ring either on Mayday or any other day in the year.

More substantial than the fleeting glories of the May Queen was the portion in some parishes bestowed upon the most deserving young woman of a marriageable age, and for this purpose many bequests have been made. An ancient charity school still existing among the London Docks used to elect on Mayday each year one of its girls, who received one hundred pounds as her marriage portion. It is not to be supposed that the maiden was expected to marry then and there, for May marriages are always unlucky, nor did the governors of the charity undertake to find a husband, but it was presumed that a girl with a hundred pounds to her portion would only experience the difficulties of choice among so many.

An observance of more modern origin, but which has disappeared with the class it concerned, was the general parade on Mayday of stage-coaches decked with branches and flowers, and with their coachmen in full gala costume. A new white beaver with proudly curling brim was the correct thing on the occasion; and a faint trace of the custom is to be found in the manners of the modern 'bus driver, who on Mayday is pretty sure to assume a new white hat, and to wear a bouquet of flowers in his buttonhole.

But the great Mayday of the present century was no doubt the one commemorated in a contemporary ballad, which might be sung to the old-fashioned comic tune, "When we went out a-shooting":

I never shall forget the day,
The glorious, glorious first of May,
When our gracious Queen Victoria
Opened the palace of crystal.

It was quite an ideal time that, as those who survive and witnessed it will testify, full of happy forecasts of peace and goodwill, of which the programme has not been quite fulfilled, and the world which will see a somewhat similar celebration when our gracious Queen goes to open the Colonial Palace, which has indirectly sprung from the other, is a good deal sadder if not much wiser than it was in that golden prime.

As to Mayday up to date, it must be said that if we have lost some pretty, time-expired customs, we have started others that may be prized by future generations. Mayday is sure to see a cart-horse parade of some kind, and there will be processions of water-carts, of dust-carts, and other municipal vehicles, all decked out with ribbons and flowers, with horses shining and sleek, and harness at its brightest. There will be prizes for the smartest turn-out, and some of the London vestries give a feast on the occasion, another faint survival of the stage-coachman's banquet.

But apart from any definite observance, there is always about Mayday, if the skies are propitious, the pleasant sense of renewed life and enjoyment. Great-coats and wraps are cast aside without regard to the prudent adage, "Till May be out, ne'er cast a clout." People are crowding on the tops of the omnibuses, the summer four-horse coaches are starting with teams as fresh as paint, while the horns rouse cheery echoes about Charing Cross and Piccadilly. The picture exhibitors are opening their doors: the posters on the walls announcing tourist arrangements are scanned with interest. As in Chaucer's days, "Now longen folk to go on pilgrimage." And they do go, more or less, although London itself is never more attractive than at this particular time. The parks are putting on their gayest aspect; the trees, the sward, the sparkling waters, make a pretty scene, even without the gay people; and the demonstrator from Whitechapel, who has marched with drums beating and banners

displayed all those weary miles, feels as he stretches himself on the sward that he is having a good time of it just now.

Although May Fair has long been abolished, yet what a fine Vanity Fair is going on all day long and every day as long as the season lasts! Or if you are of a more serious turn, what excitement is waiting for you in the Strand! What a concourse of nice comfortable-looking people about the classic portico of Exeter Hall; what a confluence of black coats and black silk petticoats, what pretty, demure-looking young maids and sweet, but some sour, old ones! Church dignitaries, too, you see, and powerful Nonconformist divines, and stout, perspiring promoters of movements with anxious faces and hands full of papers. And all are swallowed up in that famous hall in the Strand where once stood Cross's menagerie, and where lions roared and Chunes, the great elephant, routed and trumpeted and rang the bell for cakes!

There are other kinds of May meetings, too, going on, and the racing world is astir and rattling away to Kempton, to Newmarket, or Epsom. And with opera in full swing, and theatres doing their best to tempt people away from country or suburban pleasures, it is hard to say whether it is better to spend Mayday in town or in some rural solitude with the cuckoo to welcome it in, or more welcome still, the first notes of the nightingale, for

The liquid notes that close the eye of day,
First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill
Portend success in love;

and that is an affair which, according to all poetic authority, is especially congenial to Mayday or, indeed, to any other day in the month; although, curiously enough, ancient superstition, continued to the present day, denounces May as particularly unlucky for marriages. But that is the only slur on the character of the month which for all other purposes should be the best and brightest of the year.

"OUTLAWED."

A SHORT SERIAL.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER luncheon Hope went to Mrs. Egerton's room. Mrs. Page opened the door. She had been in the family since she was a girl, and in times of sickness or trouble her mistress preferred to have her

in attendance in place of the smart French maid.

"She knows about last night, miss," Mrs. Page whispered to Hope as she entered. "You guessed, I suppose——"

"Yes—he's safe?"

"So far; but we daren't go to him, because of those men." She went over to the couch where her mistress was lying. "Miss Brown, ma'am. She will help us, I know!"

Mrs. Egerton's sad face lightened at the sight of the girl.

Hope was shocked at the change in her. Apart from the dreadful events of the last few hours, the task of keeping up all her social duties, which her husband had imposed on her during the past three months, had told on her. Her strength, already strained to the utmost, had broken down completely under this last blow.

"You will not betray him!" she pleaded. "He is dreadfully hurt, perhaps dying, and none of us dare go to him. That dreadful man Dorton is watching every one of us, and there are spies everywhere. There isn't a servant we can trust."

"Page and Gilbert did what they could for him last night. But"—a terrified look came into her tear-wet face—"Gilbert——"

"Oh! No! no!" exclaimed Hope, shocked at the terror in the mother's face. "He would never do that! Betray his——"

"No! I am sure he would not! But he is so hard! He is like his father in those things. But he thinks so much of the family's honour that he will keep silence—if only for that. But Mr. Egerton would give him up. He says that those who sin against the law must bear the consequences, and the better chances they have had the greater should be their punishment. He is so proud of the family's good name, and I know all this has nearly broken his heart."

"But——" the girl began indignantly.

"Hush! You mustn't say a word against Mr. Egerton. It has been all my fault. He has been very patient—and Wilfred—— But I am to blame. He was my first-born and I idolised him. I spoilt him! I would not listen to what his father said. If he punished him I thought he was harsh and unkind. But he and Wilfred never understood each other, and I know that Wilfred——"

Her tears fell fast as the long array of

her first-born son's sins and follies rose up before her.

"But he was not wicked!" she went on with passionate vehemence. "He was reckless, and high-spirited, and fond of pleasure; but he always loved me. Perhaps if his father had been more patient—but he grew tired of forgiving him at last, and was always comparing him with Gilbert. Gilbert was always a good son, while poor Wilfred——"

Hope flashed into revolt for the sake of the outcast son.

"The wildest sons sometimes turn out the best," she exclaimed, speaking from the wide experience of the school-room.

Mrs. Egerton shook her head. But the generous championship cheered her slightly. "He was very reckless; but I know he was good at heart; and he was going to turn over a new leaf. He had given me his solemn promise. I shall not forget that night. He stole into the house, one night a year ago, when his father was away. Just think of it, Hope! He was pale, and thin, and cold! He had been hungry! He laughed about it as he sat warming his hands at the fire, just as he used to laugh when, a schoolboy, he would come in from his riding or football! But I couldn't laugh. It hurt me so to see him want while we were living in luxury. And that night, before he slipped away again like a thief out of his own father's house, he promised me to lead a better life! And then that awful thing happened!"

Hope, being in the school-room at the time, had heard nothing of it, though every paper had been full of it. The topic had naturally been avoided by the Egertons' friends and acquaintances, and during the short time she had associated with them, Hope had only heard hints of Wilfred Egerton having recently crowned his reckless career by getting himself mixed up in a very disgraceful affair.

"He is innocent! He is shielding some one!" flushing faintly as she met the girl's pure eyes. "He is chivalrous and generous. He broke his bail for that. It looks dreadful and disgraceful, I know. But I am certain he only ran away, and keeps in hiding, to shield—some one else——"

"May I come in, mother?"

The two started as they heard Gilbert at the door.

He glanced at them both with a rather curious look on his face as he entered.

"Gilbert!" his mother exclaimed eagerly. "Hope will do what we want, I know."

And before he could speak she had told the girl her reason for sending for her.

Some one must make an effort to reach Wilfred; none of themselves dared venture. They felt that Dornton was keeping too close a watch on them. Mrs. Page, as an old family servant, and one who had been devoted to the fugitive, was evidently also under his supervision. At any moment he might ask to speak with one of them; while Mr. Egerton, who was also kept ignorant of his son's hiding-place, made the matter still more difficult. As a last resource, Mrs. Egerton and Mrs. Page had thought of Hope. Her conduct that morning had roused Mrs. Page's confidence.

Mrs. Egerton asked her now to go and see Wilfred, and carry to him any necessities that he might want.

It was plain that Gilbert, for some reason or other, was strongly opposed to the plan. But for want of finding a better, he said nothing, while his mother eagerly explained to Hope the arrangements they had made. Perhaps he had seen the uselessness of opposing the mother's blind love.

Hope acquiesced eagerly.

"Oh, let me go!" she exclaimed. "I am sure I can manage it. Mr. Egerton!" turning with an impulsive movement to him, "do you think I can't be trusted?"

His eyes darkened, and once again she caught a glimpse of that merciless sternness which had transformed him the night before.

"You should not go if I could help it," he said slowly and distinctly.

A little pleading cry broke from his mother.

"Oh, Gilbert! How unjust you are! Let her go!"

He moved away. Hope, full of indignation and scorn, turned back to Mrs. Egerton for further directions.

"You must go to Page. You know the housekeeper's room, don't you?" said Mrs. Egerton. "She will show you what you are to do." Then, as if some reluctance conquered for a moment the selfishness of the mother's love: "You aren't afraid, dear? It is a dark and dismal way enough. I wouldn't send you if I had any one else."

Young Egerton turned sharply.

Hope, her face a little paler, but her eyes brave and shining, smiled back into

the troubled, pleading face of the mother. The sweet grace of her girlishness, that look on her face, even the white daintiness of her pretty morning frock, all produced so strange an effect on the young man as she stood there waiting to be sent, because "there was no one else," that he stalked over to the window, and staring out of it, employed the next few seconds swearing vehemently, but inaudibly, at the situation in general.

No man likes to feel that circumstances are beating him, and that is precisely what Mr. Gilbert Egerton was feeling at this moment.

Hope wasted no time; she hurried away to the housekeeper's room, which, with the kitchen offices and the servants' rooms, lay in the east wing of the house. There was a back staircase, and Hope, thinking it safer, though Gilbert told her that at this moment Dornton was in the grounds, chose it as the safest to use. She met no one on her way to it. The servants were probably all lingering over their dinner in the servants' hall, taking advantage, as they usually do, of the unexpected.

But just as she came to the staircase she caught sight of Dornton leisurely descending it. He had reached the narrow landing half-way down, and as she came through the swing-door leading to the head of the staircase she could see him distinctly. She drew back hastily, holding the green-baize-covered door that it should not swing to, and rouse him to the fact of her presence.

But he went on slowly down the staircase, not looking up, and she did not think he could have seen her.

Happily the door swung noiselessly on its hinges, and she had opened it cautiously.

But what was he doing here in the house when Gilbert Egerton had been so certain he was out of doors? Her blood ran cold at the thought of his ubiquitous presence, and then rushed, hot and passionate again, through her veins, at the idea of his prying—his insolent assumption that he could go where he would in the house. It was incredible that Mr. Egerton could permit it! She listened till he was out of sight and hearing, then crept to the staircase, and cautiously descended.

When she reached the wide, stone-flagged corridor below she waited again, looking carefully up and down it.

The hot afternoon sunlight was falling

into the corridor through a wide-open door at the end. Through this door she could see a lavender-bordered pathway of the kitchen garden. He had probably left the house again. With thankful heart she ran on to the housekeeper's room, which was near the opposite end.

As she disappeared into it, one of the various doors which opened on to the corridor was gently pulled ajar, and the detective peered out.

"Now, why was she so anxious that I should not see her?" he asked. Then, with a quick frown: "It is a shame. She is too sweet a little girl to be dragged into any affair with which Mr. Wilfred Egerton has to do."

CHAPTER VII.

THE housekeeper's room was a large, spare apartment, comfortably furnished with massive, old-fashioned furniture. It was always cool in here, even on the hottest summer day, screened as it was by the end of a thick shrubbery, between which and one of the windows ran only a narrow, gravelled pathway. There were two windows in the room, both opening almost to the ground, with broad seats running round them.

The gravelled path outside, passing under the windows, led through the shrubbery to the old bowling-green.

The windows were open, but the blinds were drawn down as if to keep out the hot sunshine. And arranged as they were, with the curtains drawn a little more forward than usual, no one could possibly see into the room from the outside, while any attempt to raise or move the blinds would be quickly detected from the room itself.

Mrs. Page, looking very anxious, awaited her. She had made ready a small basket, packed with every possible necessary.

She gave a few rapid instructions to Hope. Then going to the door opened it and looked out. There was no one in sight. She closed and locked it quickly and noiselessly—she had herself oiled the lock and hinges.

"He frightens me to death, that Mr. Dornton," she whispered to Hope. "I feel as if he sees and hears everything." Then she peeped out of the windows. There was no one on the path outside.

"It's not much of a place, miss, but there's no danger. I'll see that you aren't kept down there a moment longer than is necessary."

She was not wasting a moment. As she spoke, she moved an arm-chair that stood in one of the corners of the room near the window, and raised a piece of the carpet, which, heavy and thick, had originally come from one of the reception-rooms.

The floor was parquetry, each diagonal slab of wood laid so beautifully that the surface was like one polished sheet. But as Hope watched, the housekeeper touched a spring so cunningly hidden in one of the panels of the high wainscoting round the room, that a man not knowing the secret might have searched days and weeks, and even then would probably have failed to find it, and a piece of the parquetry rose slowly in a block of about two yards square, leaving below it a space sufficient for a person, crouching very low, to pass under it.

Hope, eager and wondering, began to feel that a girl needed a good deal of courage to take part in a scene which might have come out of one of those old romances—delight of her school-days—where secret staircases and chambers had played so important a rôle in the domestic economy of the heroines' lives.

The raised slab left bare a deep cavity which looked something like a round bricked well. A very slender iron ladder, rusty with age, led down to a narrow passage about seven feet below the floor of the room, disappearing, two yards farther on, into an archway built apparently into the foundation wall of the house itself. A breath of rotting, mouldy air floated up to the room above, and the girl, peering down with eager curiosity, drew back, afraid for the first time. It curdled the blood in her veins as if she had suddenly found herself touched by the decaying hand of some dead thing.

But as she caught the alarmed look on the housekeeper's face she made haste to reassure her.

"I shall go," she said, forcing a laugh, "only you see I'm not quite used to these mysterious passages."

"I don't half like sending you," said the housekeeper reluctantly; "and Mr. Gilbert was mad about it, but there——"

She broke off and proceeded to direct Hope as to her proceedings.

"You can't really come to harm, miss!" she said, after giving a few careful but hurried directions, for she dreaded every minute to hear the detective at the door. "You needn't be gone more than half an hour—come back sooner if you can. I

shall be waiting here, and will let you out. I shall be on the watch, and you must not give any signal in case any one but me might happen to be here. Whatever you do, miss, don't call or knock!"

Hope promised. Mrs. Page made her repeat the instructions, and then, throwing a big, dark cloak over her dress, she held the basket till Hope had crept through the opening and stood on the slender ladder. She handed down the basket and a lantern which she had already lighted, and stood there looking till Hope reached the bottom. The girl stood for a second by the archway to smile back bravely at the anxious woman watching her. She was holding the lantern so that its rays touched her face, and Mrs. Page seemed to become suddenly aware, for the first time, how very pretty the girl really was, and this discovery troubled her more now than the other thought of the dismal journey itself which Hope would have to make through that old, half-choked subterranean passage. Hope nodded brightly up at her, then turned, and stooping, crept through the low stone archway and disappeared.

As she vanished Mrs. Page hastily let the slab of flooring slip back into its place, turned back the heavy carpet, replaced the arm-chair, even dropping a piece of her needlework on the floor by it as if she had just been sitting there at work.

She was a clever, practical woman, and her intelligence was quickened by her devotion to the family.

It was her intention, should any one appear immediately on the scene who had noticed Hope entering the room, to give them to understand that she had left it by one of the windows, through which it was easy to step on to the path outside. Hope had been confident that no one had seen her entering the room a few moments ago. But Mrs. Page felt that it was impossible to take too many precautions. The thought that some one might have been watching from the shrubbery, and would so contradict her statement, dismayed her somewhat. But she had made a slight

inspection of it a short time previous, and, as far as she could see, it had been clear.

Everything had been carried out so expeditiously, that she trusted Dornton had had no time to make any fresh arrangements. Hope had been in her room barely six or seven minutes.

When everything had been done, even to unlocking the door, Mrs. Page, still with that air of being perfectly absorbed in the carrying out of the details of her scheme, sat down at her writing-table at the other end of the room. It was pay-day for the servants, and she opened her books. But she suddenly flung down her pen. That troublesome consciousness of the girl's beauty had been with her all the time.

"Lord! Master Gilbert thinks his brother a devil, I do believe!" she exclaimed angrily to herself. "Even if poor Mr. Wilfred should ever get well, which I doubt, I am sure he would never——"

The sentence was not finished.

There came a gentle knocking at the door.

Mrs. Page went pale; then after a second's pause made a violent effort to speak quietly.

"Come in," she said, bending over her accounts.

The door opened, and Dornton, smiling and cheerful, entered.

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